

SPEECH

OF THE

HON. JOHN QUINCY ADAMS,

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

ON THE

STATE OF THE NATION:

Delivered May 25, 1836.

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S P E E C H

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HON. JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

DEBATE IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

WEDNESDAY, May 25, 1836.

The joint resolution from the Senate, authorizing the President of the United States to cause rations to be distributed to suffering fugitives from Indian hostilities in Alabama and Georgia, being under debate—

Mr. Adams asked that the resolution should be read ; it was accordingly read, and was as follows :

“ Resolved, by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the President of the United States be authorized to cause rations to be delivered from the public stores to the unfortunate sufferers, who are unable to provide for themselves, and who have been driven from their homes by Indian depredations, in Alabama and Georgia, until they can be re-established in their possessions, or so long as the President shall consider it necessary.”

Mr. Adams, after observing that there was no appropriation annexed to the resolution, which, if there had been, the resolution must, by the Constitution of the United States, have been made to assume the form of a *bill*, proceeded to address the chairman of the Committee of the Whole on the State of the Union, in substance as follows :

Mr. Chairman,—There is no appropriation annexed to this resolution. We are called to vote upon it without knowing how deep it will dive into the public purse. We have no estimate from any executive department ; no statement of the numbers of the distressed and unfortunate persons whom we are called upon to relieve, not with our own moneys, but with the moneys of our constituents. By an exception to the ordinary rules of the House, especially established to guard the public treasury against the danger of rash and inconsiderate expenditures, we are to drive this resolution through all its stages in a single day. And it is, I believe, the first example of a system of gratuitous donations to our own countrymen, infinitely more formidable by its consequences as a precedent, than from any thing appearing upon its face. I shall, nevertheless, vote for it. But answerable to my constituents as I am in this as in all other cases for voting away their money, I seek for a *principle* which may justify me, to their judgment and my own, in this *lavish* disposal of the public funds.

It is but one, sir, of a class of legislative enactments now upon the pages of our statute book, introduced first, I believe, during the present session of Congress ; but with which we are already becoming familiar, and which I greatly fear will, ere long, grow voluminous. I shall take the liberty to denominate them the *scalping knife and tomahawk laws*.—

They are all urged through by the terror of those instruments of death, under the most affecting and pathetic appeals from the constituents of the sufferers, to all the tender and benevolent sympathies of our nature. It is impossible for me to withhold from those appeals a responsive and yielding voice. I have voted for all those bills devoting million after million from the public chest, for the relief and defence of these the suffering fellow citizens of my constituents. I will vote for this resolution. I will vote again and again for drafts from the treasury for the same purpose, should they become necessary, till the treasury itself shall be drained; but, for so doing, I must seek for a principle which may be satisfactory, first, to my own mind, and secondly to my constituents.

And here, sir, the gentlemen who called upon us for these bountiful contributions from the public treasure, are compelled to resort to that *common defence and general welfare* declared by the Constitution of the United States to be among the purposes for which the Constitution itself was ordained by the people. I admit their claim. There are, indeed, two grounds upon which some of them think their claim sustainable. One of them produces precedent for this exercise of power, and yet disclaims the authority of the precedent itself. You have already, by a resolution in the same words with those of the resolution now before this committee, extended this same relief to the inhabitants of Florida. But Florida is one of your territories, and you are under obligations of protection more comprehensive to its inhabitants than those which bind you to the people of the states. These receive and are entitled to the protection of their state government, and you are bound to extend that species of protection to the inhabitants of the territories, besides the protection which the inhabitants of the several states are entitled to, as members of the great confederation. The precedent, therefore, of the resolution of relief to the inhabitants of Florida, does not cover the case. We are reminded, however, that some twenty years or more ago, the people of Caraccas were visited at once with a tremendous earthquake, with famine, and with the still more heavy misfortune of a civil war. The convulsions of nature by earthquakes, the ravages of famine, and the raging passions of man in the desolations of civil war, are as destructive to human life, and as calamitous to multitudes whom they do not absolutely destroy, as the tomahawk and the scalping knife. But whatever may have been the motives or the justifying authority of Congress, more than twenty years ago, for appropriating any portion of the public moneys to the relief of the inhabitants of Caraccas, it could not establish the principle that Congress have the constitutional power to appropriate money for the relief of all human suffering, whether by earthquake, famine, civil war, or Indian ferocity. And the gentleman from Alabama himself, who so ardently urges the adoption of this resolution, tells you that he should have voted against that measure of relief to the wretched sufferers in Caraccas. Mere commiseration, though one of the most amiable impulses of our nature, gives us no power to drain the treasury of the people for the relief of the suffering object. You *must*, therefore, seek another, an additional source of power, for authority to pass this resolution; and where will you, where can you find it, but in the *war power*, and its *limitation*, not its enlargement, in that very declaration of the transcendent purposes for which the people of the United States ordained that Constitution—the *common defence and general*

welfare. Step one hair's breadth out of the circle bounding the true intent and meaning of these words, and you have no more authority to pass this resolution, than you have, by an act of Congress, to saddle the people of the United States with the insupportable burden of the whole system of the poor laws of England.

Sir, in the authority given to Congress by the Constitution of the United States to *declare war*, all the powers incidental to war are, by necessary implication, conferred upon the *Government* of the United States. Now, the powers incidental to war are derived, not from their internal municipal sources, but from the laws and usages of nations. In your relations with the Indian tribes you never declare war, though you do make and break treaties with them, whenever either to make or to break treaties with them happens to suit the purposes of the President and a majority of both Houses of Congress. For, in this matter, you have set aside the judiciary department of the Government as effectually as if there were none such in the Constitution.

There are, then, Mr. Chairman, in the authority of Congress and of the Executive, two classes of powers, altogether different in their nature, and often incompatible with each other—the war power and the peace power. The peace power is limited by regulations, and restricted by provisions, prescribed within the Constitution itself. The war power is limited only by the laws and usages of nations. The power is tremendous: it is strictly constitutional, but it breaks down every barrier so anxiously erected for the protection of liberty, of property, and of life. This, sir, is the power which authorizes you to pass the resolution now before you, and, in my opinion, there is no other.

And this, Sir, is the reason, which I was not permitted to give this morning, for voting, with only eight associates,* against the first resolution reported by the committee on the abolition petitions; not one word of discussion had been permitted on either of those resolutions. When called to vote upon the first of them, I asked only five minutes of the time of the House, to prove that it was utterly unfounded. It was not the pleasure of the House to grant me those five minutes, upon that report, from the previous question, moved and inflexibly persisted in by a member of the committee itself which reported the resolutions, (Mr. Owens, of Georgia,) to the refusal of the Speaker, sustained by a majority of the House, to permit the other gentleman from Georgia, (Mr. Glasecock,) to report upon the journal his reasons for asking to be excused from voting on that same resolution. The freedom of debate has been stifled in this House to a degree far beyond any thing that ever has happened since the existence of the Constitution of the United States; nor is it a consolatory reflection to me, how intensely we have been made to feel, in the process of that operation, that the Speaker in this House is a slave-holder. And, Sir, as I was not then permitted to assign my reasons for voting against that resolution before I gave the

* The resolution referred to, is as follows:—

“*Resolved*, That Congress possesses no constitutional authority to interfere, in any way, with the institution of slavery in any of the states of this confederacy. The vote stood—YEAS—482.

NAYS—Messrs. Adams, Clark, Denny, Everett, W. Jackson, James, Philips, Potts, Slade—9.

vote, I rejoice that the reason for which I shall vote for the resolution now before the committee, is identically the same with that for which I voted against that.

[Mr. Adams, at this, and at many other passages of this speech, was interrupted by calls to order. The chairman of the committee, (Mr. A. H. Shepherd, of North-Carolina,) in every instance decided that he was not out of order; but at this passage, intimated that he was approaching very close upon its borders; upon which Mr. Adams said, Then, I am to understand, Sir, that I am yet within the bounds of order, but that I may transcend them hereafter.]

Mr. Chairman, I claim the privilege of speech accorded to every other member of this House. I will not advert to the latitude in which that privilege has been, throughout this session, enjoyed in Committee of the Whole, by every member of the House who has chosen to exercise it. I will appeal only to what happened no longer ago than the sitting of yesterday, and of this morning, when, at the hour of one, the Speaker adjourned the House, not in the usual form of ten o'clock to-morrow morning, but to ten o'clock of Wednesday morning, that is, of this day. Is it not within the recollection of every one who hears me, that two gentlemen, both distinguished members of the House, from the State of Maryland, from the hour of seven to that of ten, or little short of that time, last evening, entertained and instructed the Committee of the Whole House, with a controversial disquisition upon the Constitution of the State of Maryland, and upon the very important question, whether the voice of the Legislature of that State was or was not an exponent of the popular will? Is it not remembered that this disquisition was held in the form of a dialogue, so animated that the retort courteous, the quib modest, the counter-check quarrelsome, and almost the lie circumstantial, passed between those gentlemen, without interruption from the chairman, and without call to order, till at last an honorable member from Tennessee proposed that the difference between the two members should be settled by arbitration! And what was the question before the committee, Sir, upon which this spirited and eloquent conference was held? Was it upon an appropriation of seven hundred thousand dollars, for arming the fortifications of the United States? Or upon an amendment to that proposal, by a reduction of the salaries of all your principal executive officers, and of the compensation of members of Congress? Sir, it was upon one of these two propositions, so exceedingly relevant to each other, that the colloquy between the two gentlemen from Maryland, upon the Constitution, Legislature, and people of that highly respectable State, was held, for hours, without interruption or call to order. And now, Sir, am I to be disconcerted and silenced, or admonished by the Chair, that I am approaching to irrelevant matter, which may warrant him to arrest me in my argument, because I say, that the reason for which I shall vote for the resolution now before the committee, levying a heavy contribution upon the property of my constituents, is identically the same with the reason for which I voted against the resolution reported by the slavery committee, that Congress has no authority to interfere, in any way, with slavery in any of the States of this Union? Sir, I was not allowed to give my reasons for that vote, and a majority of my constituents, perhaps proportionally as large as that of this House, in favor

of that resolution, may, and probably will, disapprove of my vote against it, unless my reasons for so voting should be explained to them. I asked but five minutes of the House to give those reasons, and was refused. I shall, therefore, take the liberty to give them now, as they are strictly applicable to the measure now before the committee, and are my only justification for voting in favor of this resolution.]

I return, then, to my first position, that there are two classes of powers vested by the Constitution of the United States in their Congress and Executive government: the powers to be exercised in time of peace, and the powers incident to war. That the powers of peace are limited by provisions within the body of the Constitution itself; but that the powers of war are limited and regulated only by the laws and usages of nations. There are, indeed, powers of peace conferred upon Congress, which also come within the scope and jurisdiction of the laws of nations, such as the negotiation of the treaties of amity and commerce, the interchange of public ministers and consuls, and all the personal and social intercourse between the individual inhabitants of the United States and foreign nations, and the Indian tribes, which require the interposition of any law. But the powers of war are all regulated by the laws of nations, and are subject to no other limitation. It is by this power that I am justified in voting the money of my constituents for the immediate relief of their fellow-citizens, suffering with extreme necessity, even for subsistence, by the direct consequence of an Indian war. Upon the same principle, your consuls in foreign ports are authorized to provide for the subsistence of seamen in distress, and even for their passage to their own country.

And it was upon that same principle, that I voted against the resolution reported by the slavery committee, "that Congress possess no constitutional authority to interfere, in any way, with the institution of slavery in any of the States of this confederacy," to which resolution most of those with whom I usually concur, and even my own colleagues in this House, gave their assent. I do not admit that there is, among the peace powers of Congress, such authority; but in war, there are many ways by which Congress not only have authority, but are bound to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States. The existing law, prohibiting the importation of slaves into the United States, from foreign countries, is itself an interference with the institution of slavery in the States. It was so considered by the founders of the Constitution of the United States, in which it was stipulated that Congress should not interfere in that way with the institution prior to the year 1808.

During the late war with Great Britain, the military and naval commanders of that nation issued proclamations inviting the slaves to repair to their standards, with promises of freedom and settlement in some of the British colonial establishments. This, surely, was an interference with the institution of slavery in the States. By the treaty of peace, Great Britain stipulated to evacuate all the forts and places in the United States, without carrying away any slaves. If the government of the United States, had no authority to interfere, in any way, with the institution of slavery in the States, they would not have had the authority to require this stipulation. It is well known that this engagement was not fulfilled by the British naval and military commanders; that, on the

contrary, they did carry away all the slaves whom they had induced to join them, and that the British government inflexibly refused to restore any of them to their masters : that a claim of indemnity was consequently instituted in behalf of the owners of the slaves, and was successfully maintained. All that series of transactions was an interference by Congress with the institution of slavery in the States in one way—in the way of protection and support. It was by institution of slavery alone that the restitution of slaves, enticed by proclamations into the British service, could be claimed as property. But for the institution of slavery, the British commanders could neither have allured them to their standard, nor restored them, otherwise than as liberated prisoners of war. But for the institution of slavery, there could have been no stipulation that they should not be carried away as property, nor any claim of indemnity for the violation of that engagement.

But the war power of Congress over the institution of slavery in the States is yet far more extensive. Suppose the case of a servile war, complicated, as to some extent it is even now, with an Indian war; suppose Congress were called to raise armies, to supply money from the whole Union, to suppress a servile insurrection, would they have no authority to interfere with the institution of slavery? The issue of a servile war may be disastrous. By war, the slave may emancipate himself; it may become necessary for the master to recognize his emancipation by a treaty of peace; can it for an instant be pretended that Congress, in such a contingency, would have no authority to interfere with the institution of slavery, in any way, in the States? Why, it would be equivalent to saying that Congress have no Constitutional authority to make peace.

I suppose a more portentous case certainly within the bounds of possibility—I would to God I could say not within the bounds of probability. You have been, if you are not now, at the very point of a war with Mexico—a war, I am sorry to say, so far as public rumor may be credited, stimulated by provocations on our part, from the very commencement of this administration, down to the recent authority given to General Gaines to invade the Mexican territory. It is said that one of the earliest acts of the administration was a proposal, made at a time when there was already much ill-humor in Mexico against the United States, that she should cede to the United States a very large portion of her territory—large enough to constitute nine States, equal in extent to Kentucky. It must be confessed that a device better calculated to produce jealousy, suspicion, ill-will, and hatred, could not have been contrived. It is further affirmed, that this overture, offensive in itself, was made precisely at the time when a swarm of colonists, from these United States were covering the Mexican border with land-jobbing, and with slaves, introduced in defiance of the Mexican laws, by which slavery had been abolished throughout that republic. The war now raging in Texas is a Mexican civil war, and a war for the re-establishment of slavery where it was abolished. It is not a servile war, but a war between slavery and emancipation, and every possible effort has been made to drive us into the war, on the side of slavery.

It is, indeed, a circumstance eminently fortunate for us, that this monster, Santa Anna, has been defeated and taken, though I cannot partici-

pate in that exquisite joy with which we have been told that every one having Anglo-Saxon blood in his veins, must have been delighted on hearing that this ruffian has been shot, in cold blood, when a prisoner of war, by the Anglo-Saxon leader of the victorious Texian army. Sir, I hope there is no member of this House, of other than Anglo-Saxon origin, who will deem it uncourteous, that I, being myself in part Anglo-Saxon, must, of course, hold that for the best blood that ever circulated in human veins. Oh! yes, Sir; far be it from me to depreciate the glories of the Anglo-Saxon race; although there have been times when they bowed their necks and submitted to the law of conquest, beneath the ascendancy of the Norman race. But, Sir, it has struck me as no inconsiderable evidence of the spirit which is spurring us into this war of aggression, of conquest, and of slave-making, that all the fires of ancient hereditary national hatred are to be kindled, to familiarize us with the ferocious spirit of rejoicing at the massacre of prisoners in cold blood! Sir, is there not yet hatred enough between the races which compose your southern population and the population of Mexico, their next neighbor, but you must go back eight hundred or a thousand years, and to another hemisphere, for the fountains of bitterness between you and them? What is the temper of feeling between the component parts of your own southern population, between your Anglo-Saxon, Norman-French, and Moorish-Spanish inhabitants of Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Missouri? between them all, and the Indian savage, the original possessor of the land from which you are scourging him already, back to the foot of the Rocky Mountains? What, between them all and the native American negro, of African origin, whom they are holding in cruel bondage? Are these elements of harmony, concord, and patriotism, between the component parts of a nation starting upon a crusade of conquest? And what are the feelings of all this motley compound of your southern population, toward the compound equally heterogeneous of the Mexican population? Do not you, an Anglo-Saxon, slave-holding exterminator of Indians, from the bottom of your soul, hate the Mexican-Spaniard-Indian, emancipator of slaves, and abolisher of slavery? And do you think that your hatred is not with equal cordiality returned? Go to the city of Mexico—ask any of your fellow-citizens who have been there for the last three or four years, whether they scarcely dare show their faces, as Anglo-Americans, in the streets? Be assured, Sir, that however heartily you detest the Mexican, his bosom burns with an equally deep-seated detestation of you.

And this is the nation with which, at the instigation of your executive government, you are now rushing into war—into a war of conquest, commenced by aggression on your part, and for the re-establishment of slavery, where it has been abolished, throughout the Mexican republic. For your war will be with Mexico—with a republic of twenty-four states, and a population of eight or nine millions of souls. It seems to be considered that this victory over twelve hundred men, with the capture of their commander, the President of the Mexican republic, has already achieved the conquest of the whole republic. That it may have achieved the independence of Texas, is not impossible. But Texas is to the Mexican republic not more, nor so much, as the state of Michigan is to yours; that

state of Michigan, the people of which are in vain claiming of you the performance of that sacred promise you made them, of admitting her as a state into the Union ; that state of Michigan, which has greater grievances and heavier wrongs to allege against you, for a declaration of her independence, if she were disposed to declare it, than the people of Texas have for breaking off their union with the republic of Mexico. Texas is an extreme boundary portion of the republic of Mexico—a wilderness inhabited only by Indians, till after the revolution which separated Mexico from Spain—not sufficiently populous at the organization of the Mexican confederacy to form a state by itself, and therefore united with Coahuila, where the greatest part of the indigenous population reside. Sir, the history of all the emancipated Spanish-American colonies, has been ever since their separation from Spain, a history of convulsionary wars ;—of revolutions, accomplished by single, and often very insignificant battles—of chieftains, whose title to power has been the murder of their immediate predecessors. They have all partaken of the character of the first conquest of Mexico, by Cortez, and of Peru, by Pizarro ; and this, Sir, makes me shudder at the thought of connecting our destinies indissolubly with theirs. It may be that a new revolution in Mexico will follow upon this captivity or death of their President and commanding General ; we have rumors, indeed, that such a revolution had happened even before his defeat ; but I cannot yet see my way clear to the conclusion, that either the independence of Texas, or the capture and military execution of Santa Anna, will save you from war with Mexico. Santa Anna was but one of a breed, of which Spanish-America, for the last twenty-five years, has been a teeming mother—soldiers of fortune, who, by the sword or the musket ball, have risen to supreme power, and by the sword or the musket ball have fallen from it. That breed is not extinct ; the very last intelligence from Peru tells of one who has fallen there, as Yturbide, and Mina, and Guerrero, and Santa Anna, have fallen in Mexico. The same soil which produced them, is yet fertile to produce others. They reproduce themselves, with nothing but a change of the name and of the man. Your war, Sir, is to be a war of races—the Anglo-Saxon American pitted against the Moorish-Spanish-Mexican-American ; a war between the Northern and Southern halves of North-America ; from Passamaquoddy to Panama. Are you prepared for such a war ?

And again, I ask, What will be your *cause* in such a war ? Aggression, conquest, and the re-establishment of slavery where it has been abolished. In that war, Sir, the banners of *freedom* will be the banners of Mexico ; and your banners, I blush to speak the word, will be the banners of *slavery*.

Sir, in considering these United States and the United Mexican States as mere masses of power coming to collision against each other, I cannot doubt that Mexico will be the greatest sufferer by the shock. The conquest of all Mexico would seem to be no improbable result of the conflict, especially if the war should extend no further than to the two mighty combatants. But will it be so confined ? Mexico is clearly the weakest of the two powers ; but she is not the least prepared for action. She has the more recent experience of war. She has the greatest number of ve-

teran warriors ; and although her highest chief has just suffered a fatal and ignominious defeat, yet that has happened often before to leaders of armies, too confident of success, and contemptuous of their enemy. Even now, Mexico is better prepared for a war of invasion upon you, than you are for a war of invasion upon her. There may be found a successor to Santa Anna, inflamed with the desire, not only of avenging his disaster, but what he and his nation will consider your perfidious hostility. The national spirit may go with him. He may not only turn the tables upon the Texian conquerors, but drive them for refuge within your borders, and pursue them into the heart of your own territories. Are you in a condition to resist him ? Is the success of your whole army and all your veteran generals, and all your militia calls, and all your mutinous volunteers, against a miserable band of five or six hundred invisible Seminole Indians, in your late campaign, an earnest of the energy and vigor with which you are ready to carry on that far otherwise formidable and complicated war ? Complicated, did I say ? And how complicated ? Your Seminole war is already spreading to the Creeks, and in their march of desolation, they sweep along with them your negro slaves, and put arms into their hands, to make common cause with them against you ; and how far will it spread, Sir, should a Mexican invader, with the torch of liberty in his hand, and the standard of freedom floating over his head, proclaiming emancipation to the slave, and revenge to the native Indian, as he goes, invade your soil ? What will be the condition of your states of Louisiana, of Mississippi, of Alabama, of Arkansas, of Missouri, and of Georgia ? Where will be your negroes ? Where will be that combined and concentrated mass of Indian tribes whom, by an inconceivable policy, you have expelled from their widely distant habitations, to embody them within a small compass on the very borders of Mexico, as if on purpose to give that country a nation of natural allies, in their hostilities against you ? Sir, you have a Mexican, an Indian, and a negro war upon your hands, and you are plunging yourself into it blindfold ; you are talking about acknowledging the independence of the republic of Texas, and you are thirsting to annex Texas, aye, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas, and Santa Fe, from the source to the mouth of the Rio Bravo, to your already over-distended dominions. Five hundred thousand square miles of the territory of Mexico would not even now quench your burning thirst for aggrandizement.

But will your foreign war for this, be with Mexico alone ? No, Sir ; as the weaker party, Mexico, when the contest shall have once begun, will look abroad, as well as among your negroes and your Indians, for assistance. Neither Great Britain nor France will suffer you to make such a conquest from Mexico ; no, not even annex the independent state of Texas to your confederation, without their interposition. You will have an Anglo-Saxon intertwined with a Mexican war to wage. Great Britain may have no serious objection to the independence of Texas, and may be willing enough to take her under her protection, as a barrier both against Mexico, and against you. But, as aggrandizement to you, she will not readily suffer it ? and, above all, she will not suffer you to acquire it by conquest and the re-establishment of slavery. Urged on by the irresistible, overwhelming torrent of public opinion, Great

Britain has recently, at a cost of one hundred millions of dollars, which her people have joyfully paid, abolished slavery throughout all her colonies in the West Indies. After setting such an example, she will not—it is impossible that she should—stand by and witness a war for the re-establishment of slavery where it had been for years abolished, and situated thus in the immediate neighborhood of her islands. She will tell you, that if you must have Texas as a member of your confederacy, it must be without the taint or the trammels of slavery; and if you will wage a war to hand-cuff and fetter your fellow-man, she will wage the war against you to break his chains. Sir, what a figure, in the eyes of mankind, will you make, in deadly conflict with Great Britain; she fighting the battles of emancipation, and you the battles of slavery; she the benefactress, and you the oppressor of human kind! In such a war, the enthusiasm of emancipation, too, would unite vast numbers of her people in aid of the national rivalry, and all her natural jealousy against our aggrandizement. No war was ever so popular in England as that war would be against slavery, the slave trade, and the Anglo-Saxon descendant from her own loins.

As to the annexation of Texas to your confederation, for what do you want it? Are you not large and unwieldy enough already? Do not two millions of square miles cover surface enough for the insatiate rapacity of your land jobbers? I hope there are none of them within the sound of my voice. Have you not Indians enough to expel from the land of their fathers' sepulchres, and to exterminate? What, in a prudential and military point of view, would be the addition of Texas to your domain? It would be weakness, and not power. Is your southern and southwestern frontier not sufficiently extensive? not sufficiently feeble? not sufficiently defenceless?—Why are you adding regiment after regiment of dragoons to your standing army? Why are you struggling, by direction and indirection, to raise *per saltum* that army from less than six to more than twenty thousand men? Your commanding general, now returning from his excursion in Florida, openly recommends the increase of your army to that number.

Sir, the extension of your sea-coast frontier from the Sabine to the Rio Bravo would add to your weakness tenfold: for it is now only weakness with reference to Mexico. It would then be weakness, with reference to Great Britain, to France, even, perhaps, to Russia, to every naval European power, which might make a quarrel with us for the sake of settling a colony: but, above all, to Great Britain. She, by her naval power, and by her American colonies, holds the keys of the Gulf of Mexico. What would be the condition of your frontier, from the mouth of the Mississippi to that of the Rio del Norte, in the event of war with Great Britain? Sir, the reasons of Mr. Monroe for accepting the Sabine as the boundary, were three:—First, He had no confidence in the strength of our claim as far as the Rio Bravo; secondly, He thought it would make our Union so heavy that it would break into fragments by its own weight; thirdly, He thought it would protrude a long line of sea-coast, which, in our first war with Great Britain, she might take into her own possession, and which we should be able neither to defend nor to recover. At that time there was no question of slavery or of abolition

involved in the controversy. The country belonged to Spain: it was a wilderness, and slavery was the established law of the land. There was then no project for carrying out nine slave states, to hold eighteen seats in the other wing of this capitol, in the triangle between the mouths and sources of the Mississippi and Bravo rivers. But, what was our claim? Why, it was that La Salle, having discovered the mouth of the Mississippi, and France, having made a settlement at New-Orleans, France had a right to one half the sea-coast from the mouth of the Mississippi to the next Spanish settlement, which was Vera Cruz. The mouth of the Rio Bravo was about half way from the Balize to Vera Cruz; and so, as grantees from France to Louisiana, we claimed to the Rio del Norte, though the Spanish settlement of Santa Fe was at the head of that river. France, from whom he had received Louisiana, utterly disclaimed ever having raised such a pretension. Still we made the best of the claim that we could, finally yielded it for the Floridas, and for the line of the 42d degree of latitude, from the source of the Arkansas river to the South Sea. Such was our claim; and you may judge how much confidence Mr. Monroe could have in its validity. The great object and desire of the country then was to obtain the Floridas. It was General Jackson's desire; and in that conference with me, to which I have heretofore alluded, and which it is said he does not recollect, he said to me that so long as the Florida rivers were not in our possession, there could be no safety for our whole southern country.

But, Sir, suppose you should annex Texas to these United States; another year would not pass before you would have to engage in a war for the conquest of the Island of Cuba. What is now the condition of that Island? Still under the nominal protection of Spain. And what is the condition of Spain herself? Consuming her own vitals in a civil war, for the succession of the crown. Do you expect, that whatever may be the issue of the war, she can retain even the nominal possession of Cuba? After having lost *all* her continental colonies in North and South America, Cuba will stand in need of more efficient protection; and above all, the protection of a naval power. Suppose that naval power should be Great Britain. There is Cuba at your very door; and if you spread yourself along a naked coast, from the sabine to the Rio Bravo, what will be your relative position towards Great Britain, with not only Jamaica, but Cuba, and Porto Rico in her hands, and abolition for the motto to her union cross of St. George and St. Andrew? Mr. Chairman, do you think I am treading on fantastic grounds? Let me tell you a piece of history, not far remote. Sir, many years have not passed away, since an internal revolution in Spain, subjected that country and her king, for a short time, to the momentary government of the Cortes. That revolution was followed by another, by which, under the auspices of a French army, with the Duke d'Angouleme at their head, Ferdinand the seventh was restored to a despotic throne; Cuba had followed the fortunes of the Cortes, when they were crowned with victory; and when the counter revolution came, the inhabitants of the island, uncertain what was to be their destination, were, for some time, in great perplexity what to do for themselves. Two considerable parties arose in the island, one of which was for placing it under the protection of Great Britain, and another was

for annexing it to the confederation of these United States. By one of these parties, I have reason to believe that overtures were made to the government of Great Britain. By the other, *I know* that overtures were made to the government of the United States. And I further know that secret, though irresponsible assurances were communicated to the then President of the United States, as coming from the French government, that *they* were secretly informed that the British government had determined to take possession of Cuba. Whether similar overtures were made to France herself, I do not undertake to say; but that Mr. George Canning, then the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, was under no considerable alarm, lest under the pupilage of the Duke d'Angouleme, Ferdinand the seventh might commit to the commander of a French squadron, the custody of the Moro Castle, is a circumstance also well known to me. It happened that just about that time, a French squadron of considerable force was fitted out and received sailing orders for the West-Indies, without formal communication of the fact to the British government; and that as soon as it was made known to him, he gave orders to the British Ambassador at Paris, to demand in the most peremptory tone, what was the destination of that squadron, and a special and positive disclaimer that it was intended even to visit the Havana: and this was the occasion of mutual explanations, by which Great Britain, France and the United States, not by the formal solemnity of a treaty, but by the implied engagement of mutual assurances of intention, gave pledges of honor to each other, that neither of them should in the then condition of the island, take it, or the Moro Castle, as its citadel, from the possession of Spain. This engagement was, on all sides, faithfully performed: but, without it, who doubts that from that day to this, either of the three powers might have taken the island and held it in undisputed possession?

At this time circumstances have changed—popular revolutions both in France and Great Britain, have perhaps curbed the spirit of conquest in Great Britain, and France may have enough to do to govern her kingdom at Algiers. But Spain is again convulsed with a civil war for the succession to her crown; she has irretrievably lost all her colonies on both continents of America. It is impossible that she should hold much longer a shadow of dominion over the islands of Cuba and Porto Rico; nor can those islands, in their present condition, form independent nations, capable of protecting themselves. They must for ages remain at the mercy of Great Britain or of these United States, or of both; Great Britain is even now about to interfere in this war for the Spanish succession. If by the utter imbecility of the Mexican confederacy, this revolt of Texas should lead immediately to its separation from that republic, and its annexation to the United States, I believe it impossible that Great Britain should look on, while this operation is performing, with indifference. She will see that it must shake her own whole colonial power on this continent, in the Gulf of Mexico, and in the Caribbean Seas, like an earthquake; she will see, too, that it endangers her own abolition of slavery in her own colonies. A war for the restoration of slavery where it had been abolished, if successful in Texas, must extend over all Mexico; and the example will threaten her with imminent danger of a war of co-

lors in her own islands. She will take possession of Cuba and of Porto Rico, by cession from Spain, or by the batteries from her wooden walls ; and if you ask her by what authority she has done it, she will ask you, in turn, by what authority you have extended your sea coast from the Sabine to the Rio Bravo ? She will ask you a question more perplexing, namely—by what authority you, with freedom, independence, and democracy, upon your lips, are waging a war of extermination to force new manacles and fetters, instead of those which are falling from the hands and feet of man ? She will carry emancipation and abolition with her in every fold of her flag ! while your stars, as they increase in numbers, will overcast with the murky vapors of oppression, and the only portion of your banners visible to the eye will be the blood-stained stripes of the task master.

Mr. Chairman, are you ready for all these wars ? A Mexican war ? a war with Great Britain, if not with France ? a general Indian war ? a servile war ? and, as an inevitable consequence of them all, a civil war ? For it must ultimately terminate in a war of colors as well as of races. And do you imagine, that while, with your eyes open, you are wilfully kindling, and then closing your eyes, and blindly rushing into them ; do you imagine, that while, in the very nature of things, your own southern and southwestern states must be the Flanders of these complicated wars, —the battle field upon which the last great conflict must be fought, between slavery and emancipation—do you imagine that your Congress will have no constitutional authority to interfere with the institution of slavery, *in any way*, in the states of this confederacy ? Sir, they must and will interfere with it—perhaps to sustain it by war ; perhaps to abolish it by treaties of peace ; and they will not only possess the constitutional power so to interfere, but they will be bound in duty to do it by the express provisions of the Constitution itself. From the instant that your slaveholding states become the theatre of war—civil, servile, or foreign—from that instant, the war powers of Congress extend to interference with the institution of slavery in every way in which it can be interfered with, from a claim of indemnity for slaves taken or destroyed, to the cession of the state burdened with slavery, to a foreign power.

Sir, it is by virtue of this same war power, as now brought into exercise by this Indian war in Florida, Alabama, and Georgia, that I vote for the resolution before the committee. By virtue of this, I have already voted in the course of this session to increase your standing army, by a second regiment of dragoons, to authorize your President to accept the services of ten thousand volunteers, and to appropriate millions of the public money to suppress the Indian hostilities—all for the common defence—all for the general welfare. And if, on this occasion, I have been compelled to avail myself of the opportunity to assign my reasons for voting against the first resolution reported by the slavery committee, it is because it was the pleasure of a majority of the House, this morning, to refuse me the permission to assign my reasons for my vote, when the question was upon those resolutions themselves.

Sir, it is a melancholy contemplation to me, and raises fearful forbodings in my mind, when I consider the manner in which that report and those resolutions have been disposed of by the House. I have twice

asked permission of this House, to offer two resolutions, calling for information from the President, upon subjects of infinite importance to this question of slavery, to our relations with Mexico, and to the peace of the country. When I last made the attempt, a majority of the House voted by yeas and nays to suspend the rules to enable me to offer *one* of the two resolutions—but the majority not amounting to two-thirds, my resolution has not yet obtained from the House the favor of being considered. Had it been the pleasure of the House to indulge the call, or to allow me the privilege of assigning my reasons for my vote on the resolution this morning, the remarks that I have now made might have been deemed more appropriate to those topics of discussion, than to the question more immediately now before the committee. They are reflections, however, which I deem it not less indispensable to make, than they are painful to be made—extorted from me by a condition of public affairs unexampled in the history of this country. Heretofore, calls upon the executive department for information, such as that which I have proposed to make, were considered as among the rights of the members of this House, which it was scarcely deemed decent to resist. A previous question, smothering all discussion upon resolution reported by a committee, affecting the vital principles of the Constitution, moved by one of the members who reported the resolutions, and sustained by the members of that committee itself, is an occurrence which never before happened in the annals of this government. The adoption of those resolutions of the House had not even been moved. Upon the mere question whether an extra number of the report of the committee should be printed, a member moves the re-commitment of the report, with instructions to report a new resolution. On this motion, the previous question is moved, and the Speaker declares that the main question is not on the motion to re-commit, not on the motion to print an extra number of copies of the report, but upon the adoption of three resolutions, reported, but never even moved in the House. If this is to be the sample of our future legislation, it is time to awake from the delusion that freedom of speech is among the rights of the members of the minority of this House.

To return, Mr. Chairman, to the resolution before the committee. I shall vote for this application of moneys, levied by taxation upon my constituents, to feed the suffering and starving fugitives from Indian depredation and revenge. How deeply searching in the coffers of your Treasury this operation will ultimately be, no man can at this time foretell. The expenditure authorized by this resolution, may be not in itself very considerable; but in its progress, it has already stretched from Alabama to Georgia—how much further it may extend, will be seen hereafter. I turn my eyes away from the prospect of it now; but am prepared to meet the emergency, if it should come, with all the resources of the Treasury.

But, Sir, I shall not vote for this relief to the suffering inhabitants of Alabama, and of Georgia, upon the ground on which the gentleman from Alabama, (Mr. Lewis,) and the gentleman from South Carolina, (Mr. Thompson,) have been disposed to place it. Little reason have the inhabitants of Georgia and of Alabama to complain that the government of the United States has been remiss or neglectful in protecting them from

Indian hostilities; the fact is directly the reverse. The people of Alabama and Georgia are now suffering the recoil of their own unlawful weapons. Georgia, Sir—Georgia, by trampling upon the faith of our national treaties with the Indian tribes, and by subjecting them to her state laws, first set the example of that policy which is now in the process of consummation by this Indian war. In setting this example, she bade defiance to the authority of the government of the nation; she nullified your laws; she set at naught your executive and judicial guardians of the common constitution of the land. To what extent she carried this policy, the dungeons of her prisons, and the records of the Supreme Judicial Court of the United States, can tell. To those prisons she committed inoffensive, innocent, pious ministers of the Gospel of Truth, for carrying the light, the comforts, and the consolations of that Gospel to the hearts and minds of these unhappy Indians. A solemn decision of the Supreme Court of the United States pronounced that act a violation of your treaties and of your laws. Georgia defied that decision: your Executive Government never carried it into execution; the imprisoned missionaries of the Gospel were compelled to purchase their ransom from perpetual captivity by sacrificing their rights as freemen to the meekness of their principles as Christians; and you have sanctioned all these outrages upon justice, law, and humanity, by succumbing to the power and the policy of Georgia, by accommodating your legislation to her arbitrary will; by tearing to tatters your old treaties with the Indians, and by constraining them, under *peine forte et dure*, to the mockery of signing other treaties with you, which, at the first moment when it shall suit your purpose, you will again tear to tatters, and scatter to the four winds of heaven, till the Indian race shall be extinct upon the continent, and it shall become a problem beyond the solution of antiquaries and historical societies, *what* the red man of the forest was.

This, Sir, is the remote and primitive cause of the present Indian war: your own injustice, sanctioning and sustaining that of Georgia and Alabama. This system of policy was first introduced by the present administration of your national government. It is directly the reverse of that system which had been pursued by all the preceding administrations of this government, under the present Constitution. That system consisted in the most anxious and persevering efforts to civilize the Indians; to attach them to the soil upon which they had lived; to enlighten their minds; to soften and humanize their hearts; to fix in permanency their habitations; and to turn them from the wandering and precarious pursuits of the hunter, to the tillage of the ground; to the cultivation of corn and cotton; to the comforts of the fire-side; to the delights of *home*.—This was the system of Washington and of Jefferson, steadily pursued by all their successors, and to which all your treaties, and all your laws of intercourse with the Indian tribes, were accommodated. The whole system is now broken up; and instead of it you have adopted that of expelling by force or by compact, all the Indian tribes from their own territories and dwellings, to a region beyond the Mississippi, beyond the Missouri, beyond the Arkansas, bordering upon Mexico; and *there* you have deluded them

with the hope that they will find a permanent abode—a final resting-place from your never-ending rapacity and persecution. *There* you have undertaken to lead the willing, and to drive the reluctant, by fraud or by force; by treaty, or by the sword and the rifle; all the remnants of the Seminoles, of the Creeks, of the Cherokees, of the Choctaws, and of how many other tribes I cannot now stop to enumerate. In the process of this violent and heartless operation, you have met with all the resistance which men in so helpless a condition as that of the Indian tribes, could make. Of the *immediate* cause of the war, we are not yet fully informed; but I fear you will find them like the remoter causes, all attributable to yourselves. It is in the last agonies of a people, forcibly torn and driven from the soil which they had inherited from their fathers, and which your own example, and exhortations, and instructions, and treaties, had rivetted more closely to their hearts; it is in the last convulsive struggles of their despair, that this war has originated; and if it brings with it some portions of the retributive justice of heaven upon our own people, it is our melancholy duty to mitigate, as far as the public resources of the national treasury will permit, the distresses of the innocent of our kindred and blood, suffering under the necessary consequences of our own wrong. I shall vote for the resolution.

[NOTE.—This speech was delivered without premeditation or notes. No report of it was made by any of the usual reporters for the newspapers. Mr. Adams has written it out himself, from recollection, at the request of several of his friends, for publication. It is, of course, not in the precise language used by him in the House. There is some amplification of the arguments which he used, and, perhaps, some omissions which have escaped his recollection. The substance of the speech is the same.]

